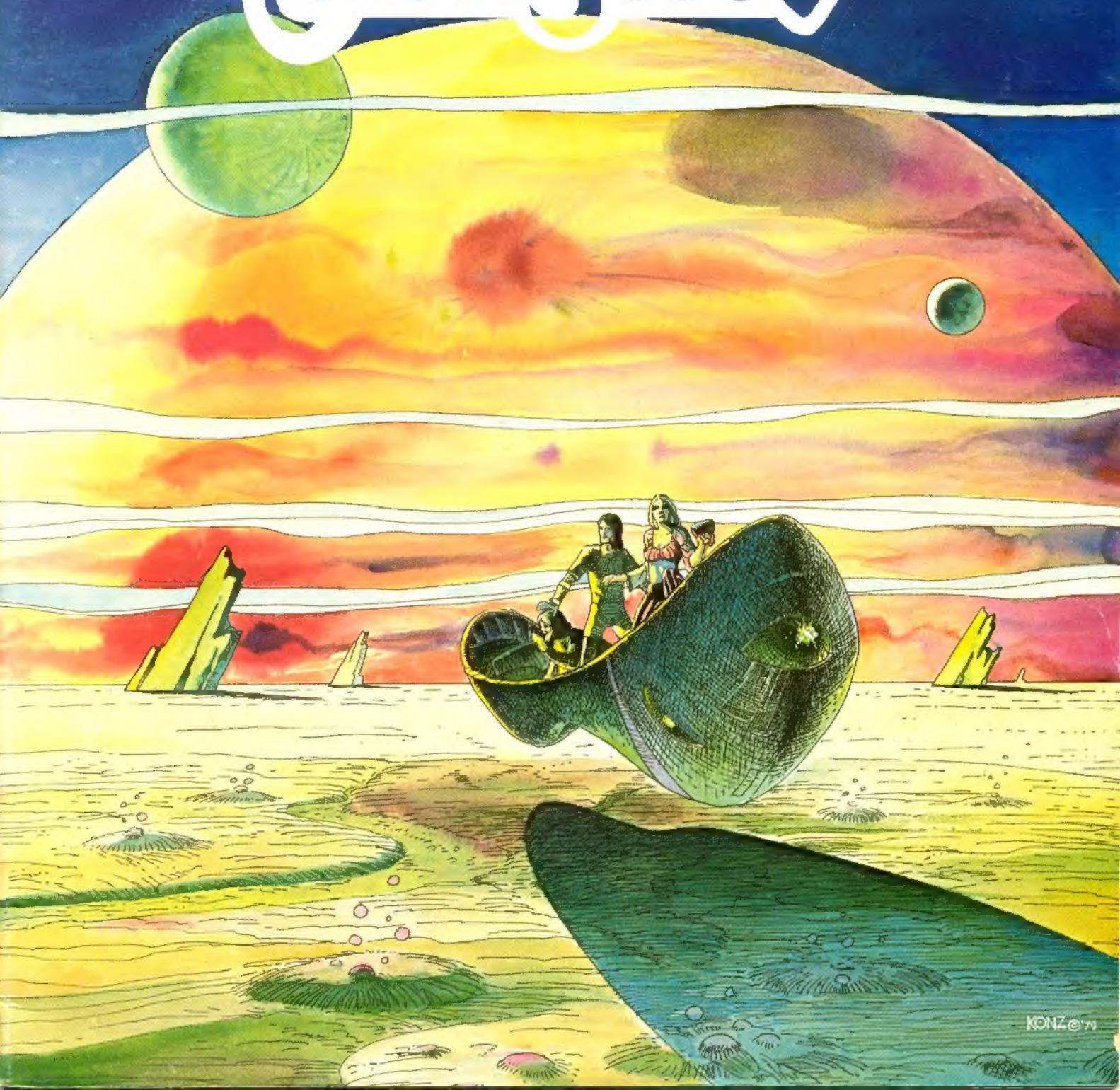


ISSUE 6

\$1.25 CAN. \$1.50
U.K. 70p

Imagine



18 June 1979
Oakland, CA

Over in our companion magazine, STAR*REACH #17, I explain how a new avenue for color story production has been created, by us acting as editorial packagers to larger, mass-market publishers. We've got three stories in HEAVY METAL either out or upcoming: "Free Ways" and "Good Vibrations" by Lee Marrs, and "Elric of Melnibone" by Michael Moorcock and Frank Brunner. And then there's "Siegfried and the Dragon" by Craig Russell, appearing in an early issue of Marvel's EPIC ILLUSTRATED.

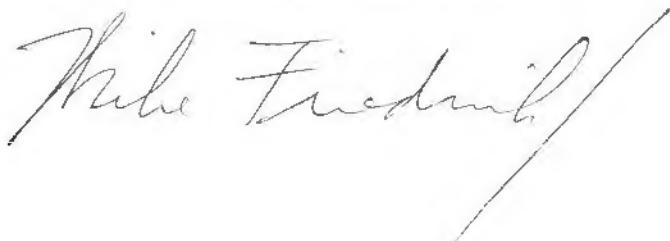
And in this last story there lies a tale relating to this issue of IMAGINE. "Siegfried" was originally scheduled to appear in IMAGINE #5 (last issue), when as was explained then we realized we just couldn't afford to run it. Craig had already drawn the story; I took it to New York; first rights to it were bought by Marvel. But for some obscure reason the editor decided he didn't like the last page, as being supposedly misleading, so by mutual agreement a new final page was drawn and will run with the story in Marvel. The original last page (which was fine with me) runs as our back cover. So you get two endings to compare.

On the front cover is the work of a newcomer to these pages, Stephen Konz of Seattle, also featured prominently in the current STAR*REACH. Of himself, he writes, "I was born in Alabama, spent my childhood in Nigeria, high school and college in Texas, moved to Denver and now have resided in Seattle for 4½ years, where I make a living doing product illustration. Doing my own comics was my first artistic venture when I was a kid, and now I've come full circle. Other passions include the mountains (climbing, hiking) and Zen Buddhism (to keep me sane)." I like his fresh approach.

Also in this issue is another segment of Michael Schwaberow's "Nebula" novel, plus a new collaboration by regular contributors Ken Steacy and Dean Motter and a short piece by Masaichi Mukaiide.

For the latest info, subscribe to our irregular (every 3 months or so) newsletter by sending us six self-addressed stamped envelopes.

'Bye.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Friedrich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Mike" on the top line and "Friedrich" on the bottom line, separated by a diagonal line.

IMAGINE #6 (July, 1979) is published quarterly by Star*Reach Productions, P.O. Box 2328, Berkeley, CA 94704; Mike Friedrich, editor and publisher. © Copyright 1979 Star*Reach Productions. Front cover art and "Dewcatcher" © 1979 Stephen Konz. Back cover ("Siegfried & the Dragon") © 1979 P. Craig Russell. "The Song of Asmodeus" © 1979 Iconoclast Imageworks. "Nebula" © 1979 Michael Schwaberow. "The Salvation" © 1979 Masaichi Mukaiide. Address all inquiries c/o Star*Reach Productions.

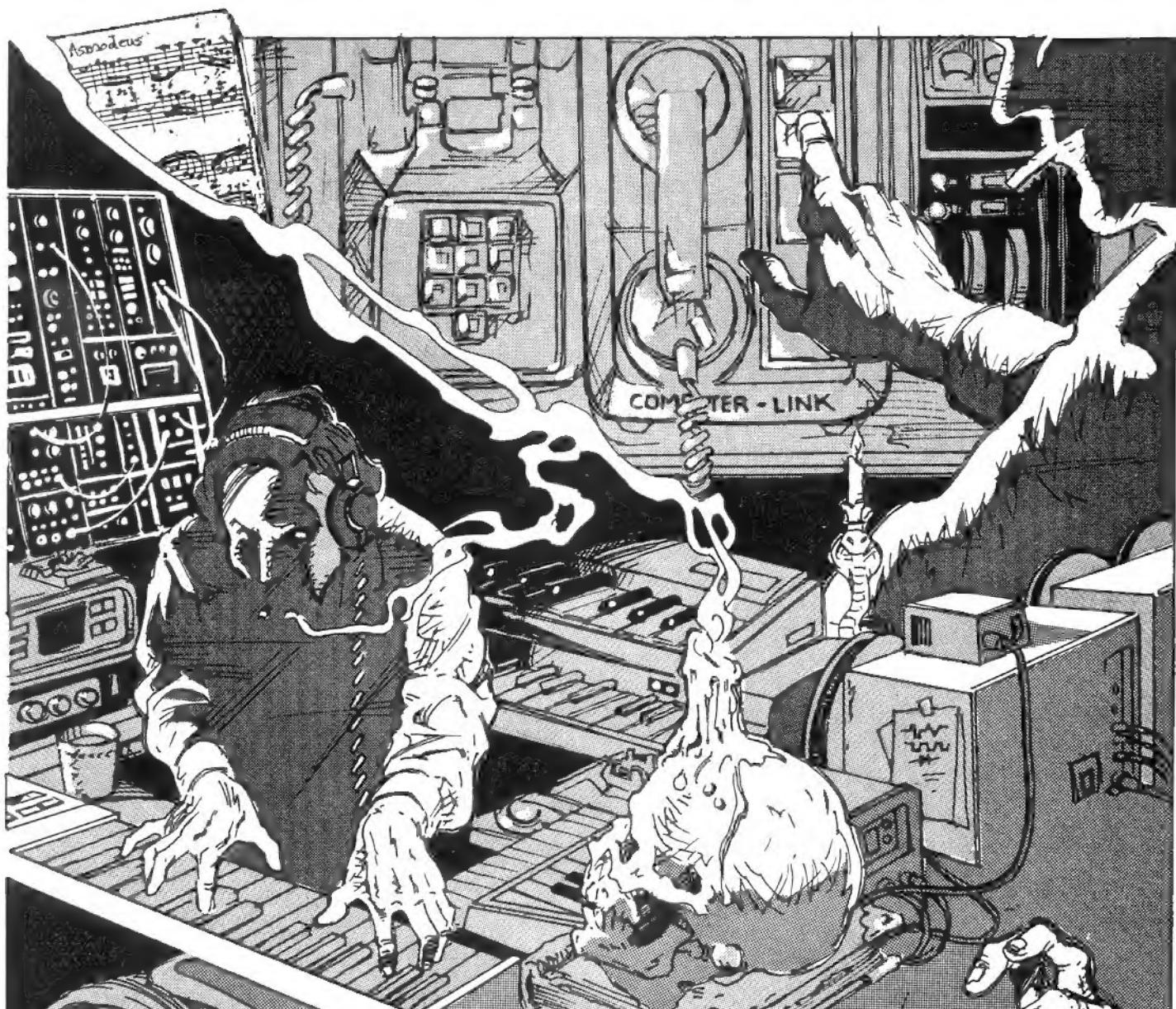
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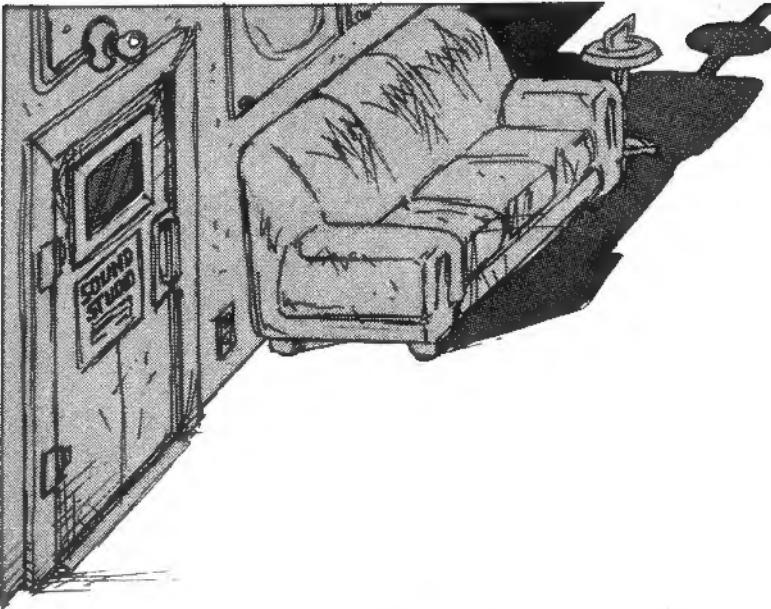
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ANY SIMILARITY TO REAL PERSONS, LIVING OR DEAD, EXCEPT FOR PURPOSES OF SATIRE, IS COINCIDENTAL.

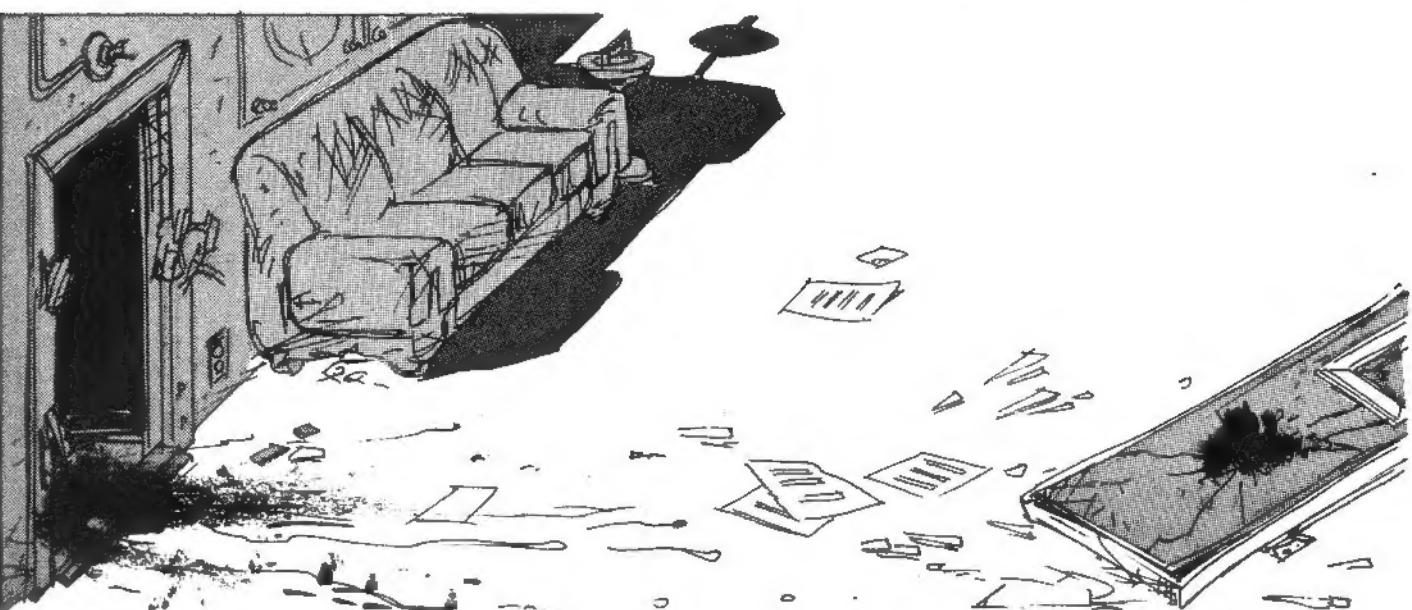
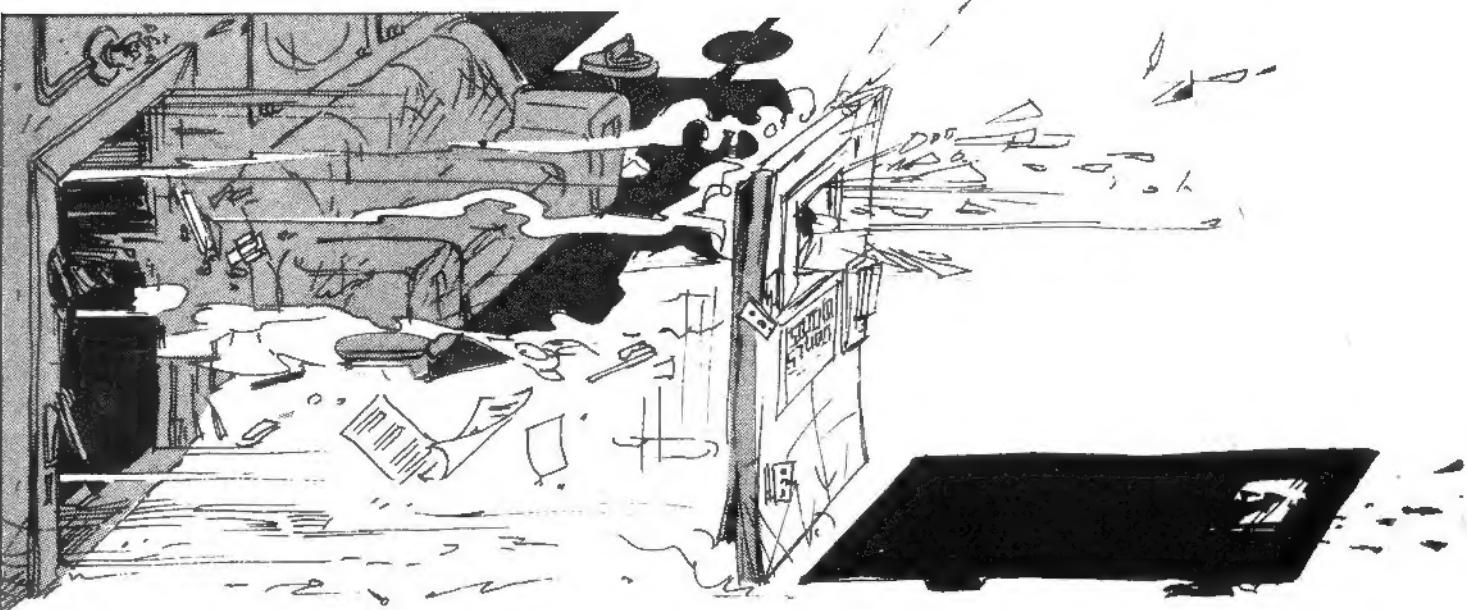


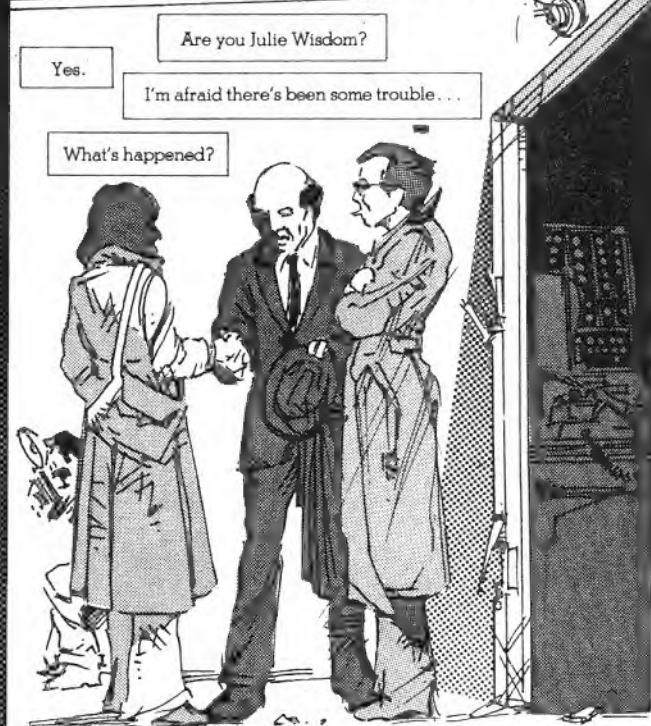
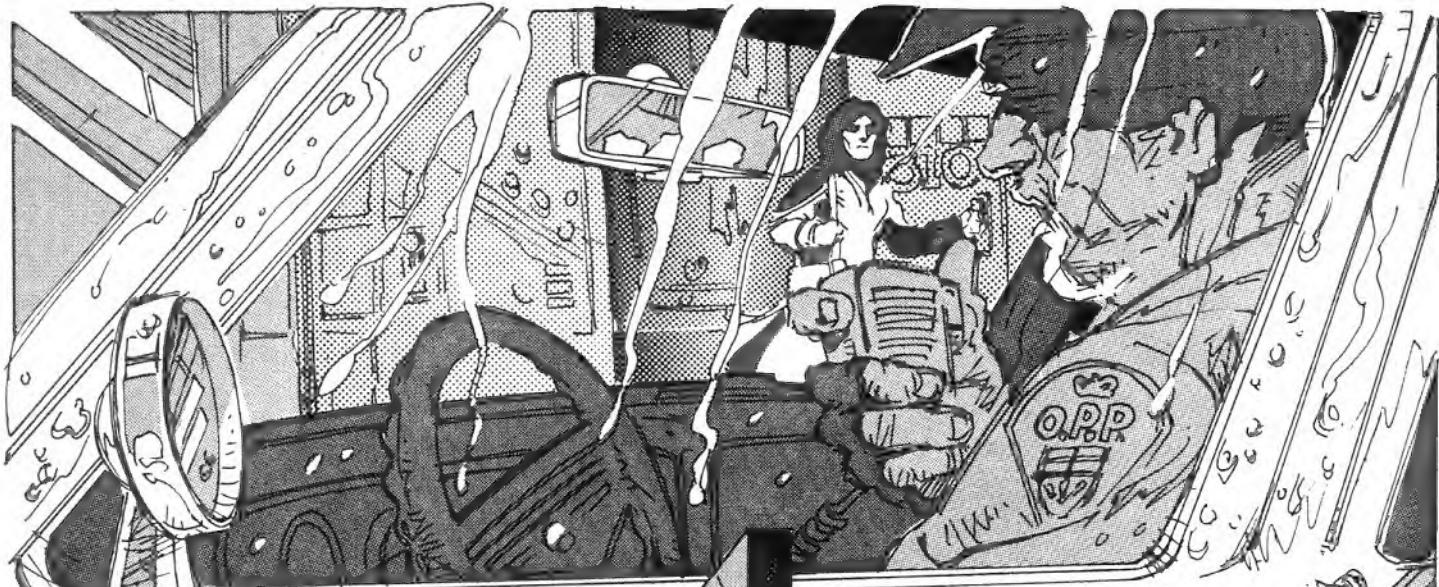


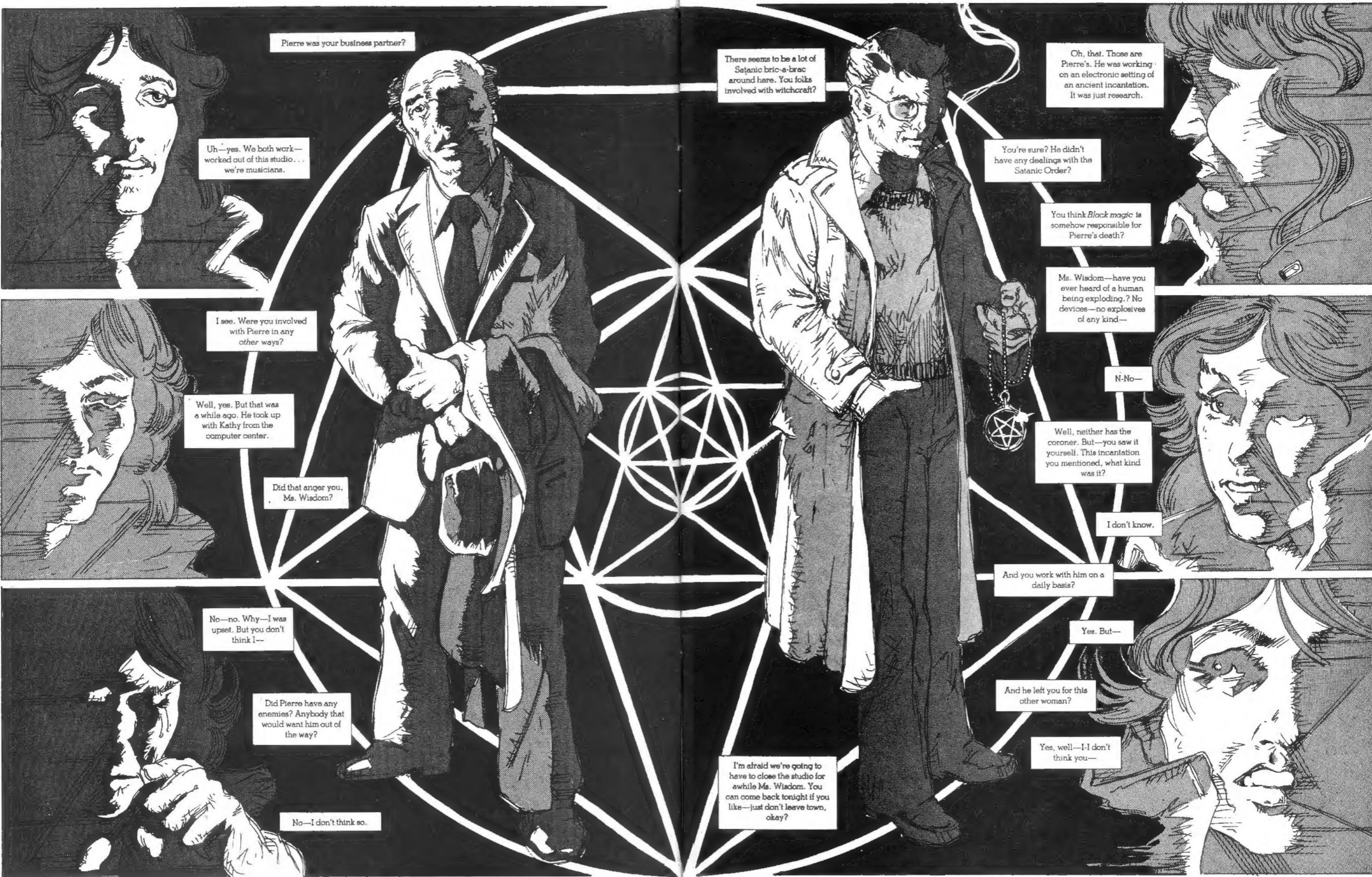
the Song of Asmodeus

(2)

Written and Illustrated by Dean Motter and Ken Steacy







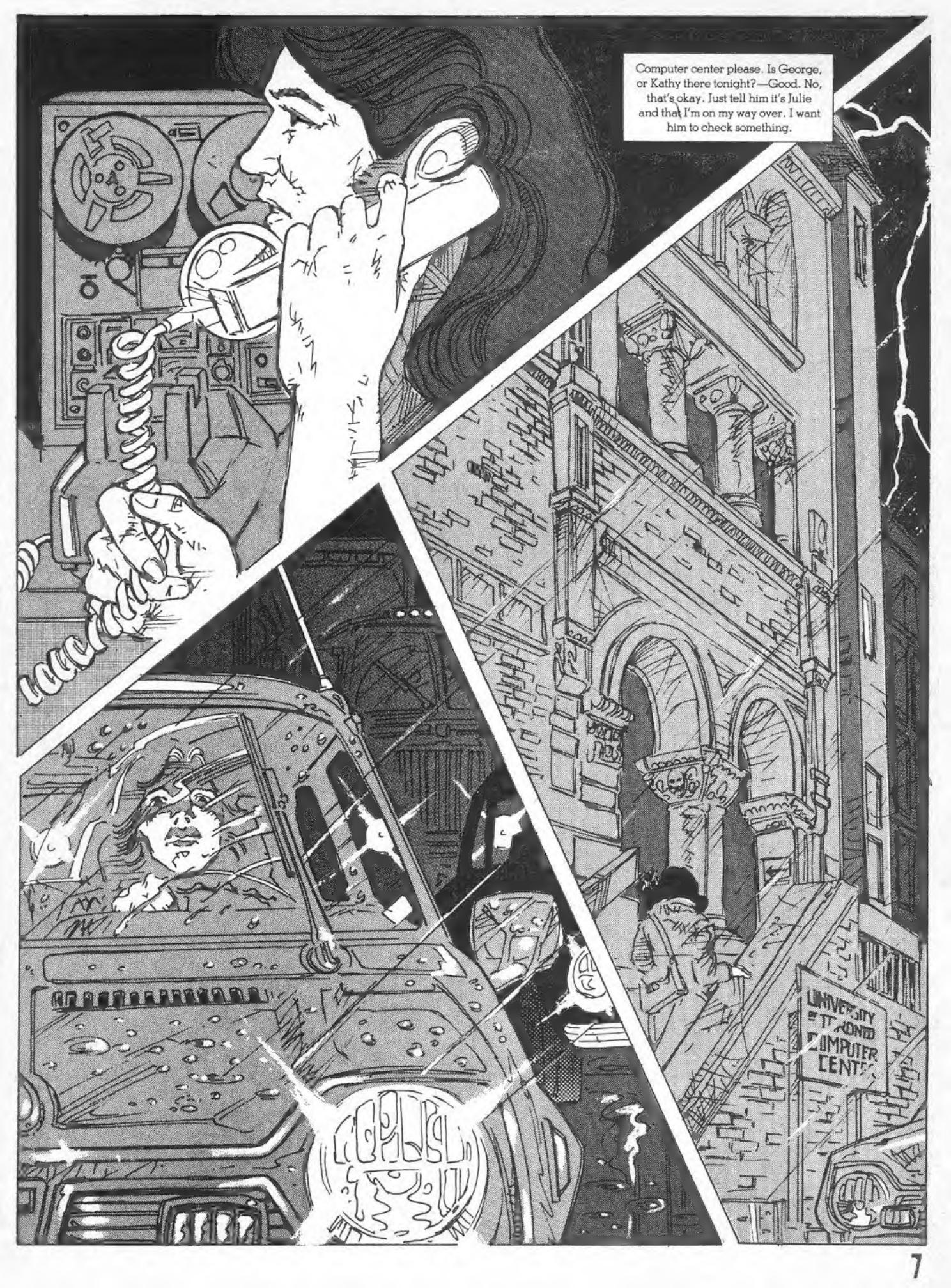


My poor Pierre...
I wonder what you
played last...

That's strange—

Very strange!

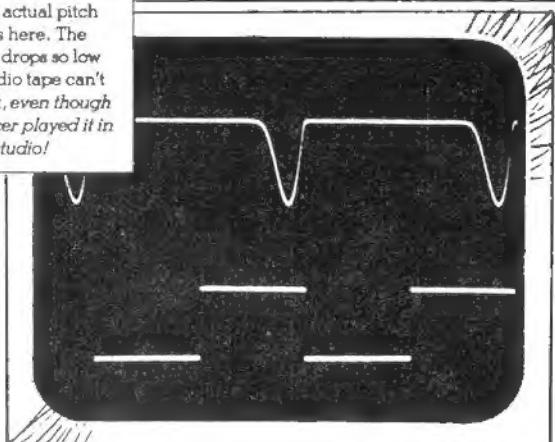
The computer link!



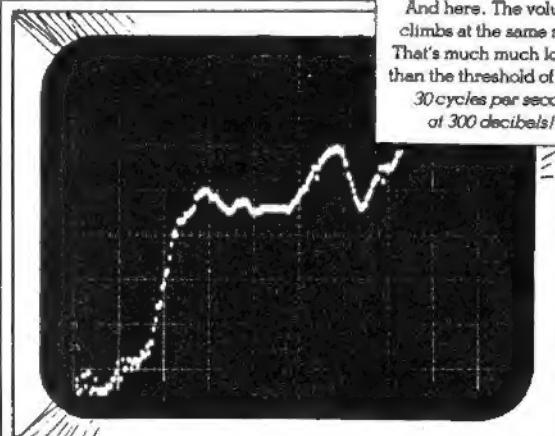
Computer center please. Is George, or Kathy there tonight?—Good. No, that's okay. Just tell him it's Julie and that I'm on my way over. I want him to check something.



Look. The actual pitch descends here. The frequency drops so low that the audio tape can't reproduce it, even though the synthesizer played it in the studio!



And here. The volume climbs at the same rate. That's much much louder than the threshold of pain! 30 cycles per second at 300 decibels!



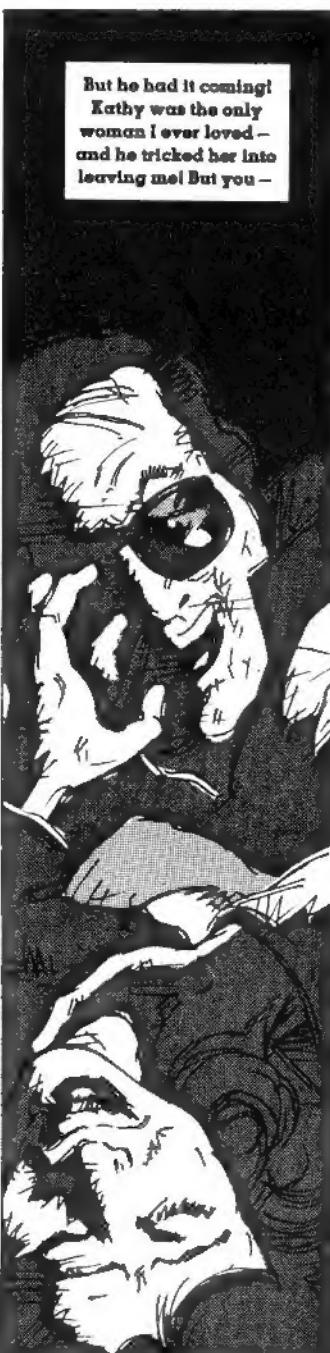
That kind of sound would—



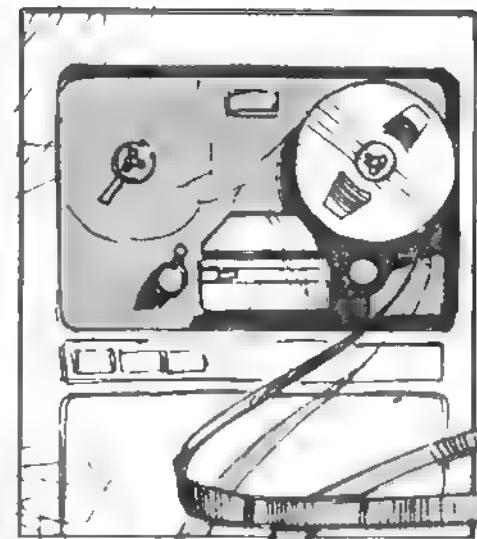
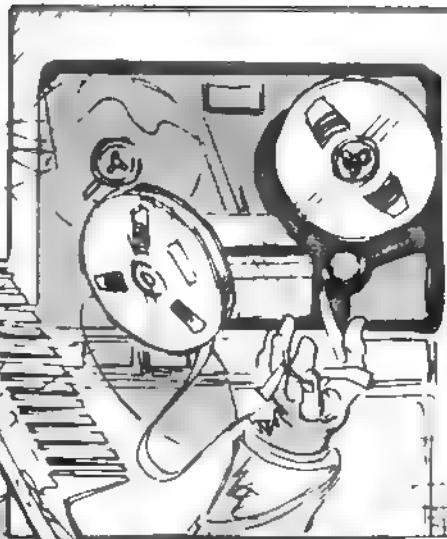
But Pierre could never do that manually... only the program could—



No...







Kathy Thank God!

It's... it's okay now June



I came down to tell George
about what happened to
Pierre. I heard
everything.



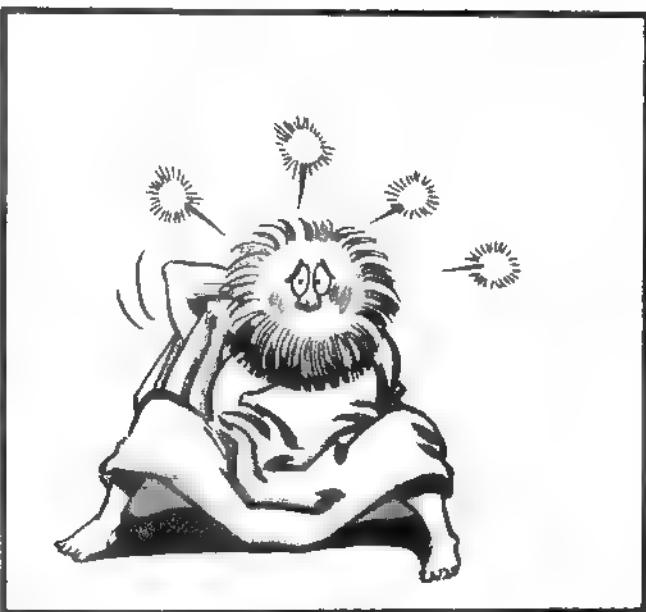
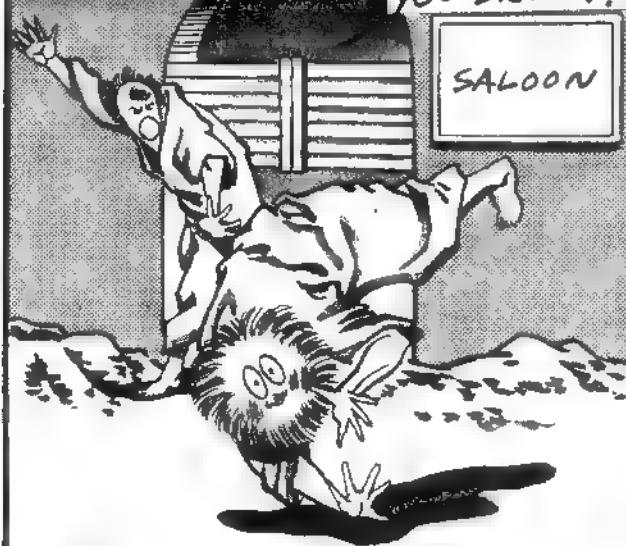
I think it's still
raining outside

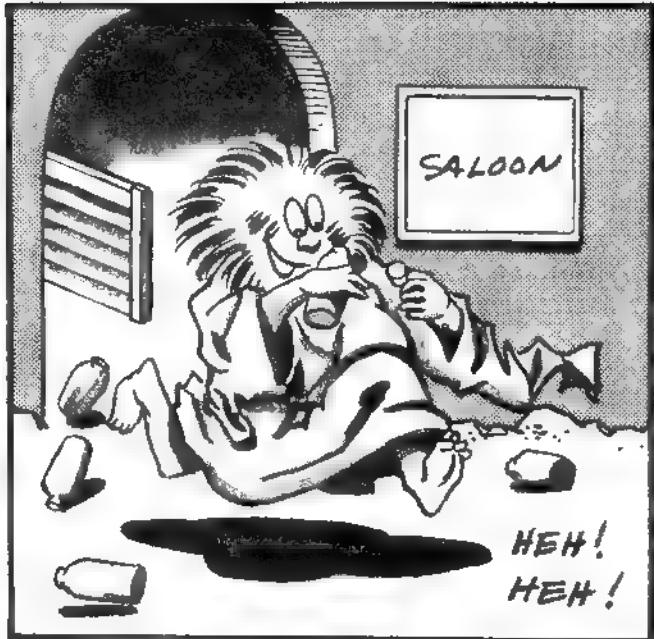
END

SALVATION

GET OUT!
YOU DRUNK!

SALOON





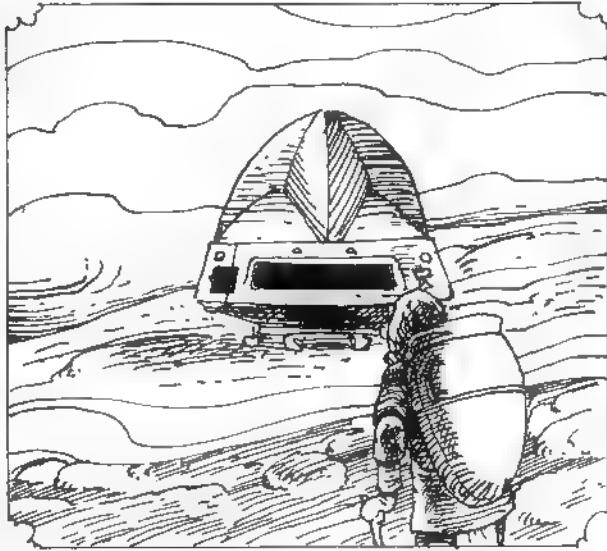
END

THE DEWCATCHER

© KONZ '79

FOR AS LONG AS HE CAN
REMEMBER, HE HAS BEEN ROAMING
THESE MISTY MOUNTAINS, FOLLOWING
THE PATTERN UNQUESTIONINGLY,
GATHERING THE DEW FOR
THE UNSEEN VALLEY
PEOPLE





A SIMPLE LIFE IS HIS: GATHER THE NUTRITIOUS DEW, FEED IT INTO THE DEW WELL, EAT, SLEEP, THEN LOOK FOR MORE DEW...

BUT IT IS THE WAY OF THINGS THAT THE SLOW SIMPLE LIFE IS OFTEN POISED PRECARIOUSLY ON THE BRINK OF DRAMATIC CHANGE! IT COMES TO OLMANDY THE DEW-CATCHER AS VOICES ON THE WIND...

ADS!... AH... WHAT...



AND WHATEVER SPIRIT IT IS THAT MOVES A PERSON TO LAY DOWN THE CONDITIONING OF MANY YEARS AND SEEK OUT THE UNKNOWN, NOW MOVES OVER THIS OLD MAN...

NO TELLING ... WHERE...



NO, YOU'RE QUITE WRONG, THULE, DARLING! I'M SURE IT'S JUST THE NATURAL DECLINATION OF THE FIELD THAT I DIDN'T ALLOW FOR! WE'RE STILL LOCKED INTO THE DIMENSIONAL INTERFACE!

WELL, YOU'RE THE ONE WITH A WHOLE TEN MINUTES OF DI-JUMPING EXPERIENCE UNDER YOUR BELT! AND I SUPPOSE THIS MIST AND ROCKS IS JUST A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION!

PLEASE DON'T BE SARCASTIC, LOVE! EVEN IF I HAVEN'T 'JUMPED' BEFORE, I DID TAKE A WHOLE COURSE IN DI-THEORY AT SCHOOL! IT'S SIMPLE!



AND YES, THIS IS A FIGMENT OF YOUR IMAGINATION! IN THE SUPRA-DIMENSIONAL MODE, OUR PSYCHE TENDS TO PROJECT OUR SUBCONSCIOUS IMPULSES OUTWARD INTO THE NON MATERIAL UNIVERSE! THINK OF IT AS A DREAM PROJECTED LIKE A HOLOGRAPH, IF YOU WILL! AND IT MUST BE YOUR DREAM, THULE, BECAUSE I KNOW HOW TO SUPPRESS MINE!

THAT'S REMARKABLE! BUT I'VE NEVER DREAMED THIS DREAM BEFORE! I ONLY DREAM OF YOU, ADJ!

OH, YOU SWEET LIAR! COME OVER HERE AND GIVE ME A BIG KISS..

WHY LOOK! IT'S AN OLD MAN! IS THIS A FATHER-FIGURE OF YOURS?



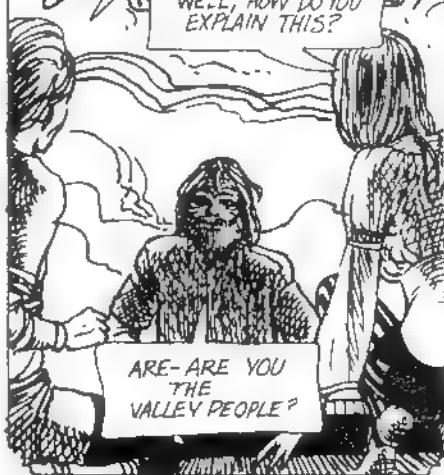
HA! VERY FUNNY!! YOU KNOW I WAS AT-TUBER JUST LIKE YOU! DO I LOOK LIKE AN OUTLANDER?

WELL, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?



OH, MARVELOUS! HE EVEN TALKS! I HAD NO IDEA IT COULD BE SO REALISTIC!

I AM OLMANOV, THE DEW-CATCHER! I AM NO DREAM!



I... I CAN'T REMEMBER... IT'S HAZY....

THERE, YOU SEE? YOU'VE BEEN DREAMED UP OUT OF THULE'S PSYCHE WITH ONLY A SEMBLANCE OF MEMORY TO MANIFEST A FACET OF HIS SUBCONSCIOUS! YOU DIDN'T EXIST BEFORE WE GOT HERE AND YOU DON'T REALLY EXIST NOW!

Y'KNOW, HE LOOKS A LITTLE LIKE MY OLD TACHY-PSI PROFESSOR...



NO! THIS CAN'T BE! YOU'RE CRAZY! IT CAN'T BE.

... I HAD A REAL LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH OLD PROF. GIBBLEY! HE WAS BRILLIANT BUT SO PROPER, SO ALOOF! DO YOU SUPPOSE...?

COULD BE...

TO ME, IT IS YOU WHO ARE THE DREAM! WHO ARE YOU? DO YOU HAVE A PAST? ARE YOU NOT THE PHANTOMS HERE?

HA'HA! NOT ONLY DO WE HAVE A PAST, BUT WE HAVE A WONDERFUL FUTURE; WE HAVE JUST BEEN WED ON BILGARN! AND WILL SOON ARRIVE ON AHLHAMBRA, HONEYMOON PLANET OF THE GALAXY!

OH, DARLING, I CAN HARDLY WAIT!

AAAHH!

BAH!
IT'S USELESS!
I'M LEAVING!

WAIT! PROFESSOR!
DON'T BE ANGRY WITH
ME!

LET HIM GO,
THULE, HE'S NOT
REAL! BESIDES,
I'VE GOT THE RIGHT
ALIGNMENT NOW!
LET'S TRY...

THIS!

GODDAMMIT, ADJ!!
THIS ISN'T AHLHAMBRA!
YOU ALMOST PUT US IN
THE MIDDLE OF A RED GIANT!
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW
WHAT YOU WERE DOING!

I... I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
WHAT'S WRONG...

WELL, YOU'D BETTER
GET US OUT OF
HERE FAST! THE
FIELD WON'T
HOLD FOREVER!

OKAY!
OKAY!!
TAKE IT
EASY!!

ADJ, YOU DUMBSHIT!
YOU BLEW IT AGAIN!
THERE'S NO TELLING WHERE
WE ARE NOW!
WE'RE LOST!!

DAMN YOU THULE!
YOU MADE ME NERVOUS,
JUMPING ON ME LIKE THAT!
I CAN'T CONCENTRATE
WITH YOUR BITCHING!

OH YEAH? IF IT WEREN'T
THAT YOU ALMOST GOT
US KILLED ..

I'M DOING THE
BEST I CAN! WHAT
MORE CAN...
OH LOOK!

IT'S SO
CUTE!
WONDER WHAT
IT IS!!

I THINK IT
SEES US

IT'S WAGGING
ITS TAIL!
IT MUST BE
FRIENDLY!

BUT IT'S BIGGER
THAN IT LOOKS!
THE PERSPECTIVE
HERE IS ODD!...

IT'S HUGE!!
ADJ, D-DO
SOMETHING
!

YEAH, YEAH...

(WHEW). HEY, THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR.

HM! WE'RE BACK IN THE
INTERFACE! HOW DID
THAT HAPPEN, I WONDER?



NEBULA

SUMMARY · CHAPTER ONE

HIGHLORD ALBONITUS IS IN A FOUL MOOD. HIS HEAD ASSASSIN KREEGAR HAS GONE SUDDENLY INSANE, AND THE ONLY CLUE IS A MYSTERIOUS RING, WHICH GLOWS AS IF WITH INNER LIFE. TAKING CARE TO HIDE THE RING, ALBONITUS SUMMONS HIS COURT WITCH...



GRETCH TO CONJURE A VISION TO SHED LIGHT ON KREEGAR'S PLIGHT...



INSTEAD, ENEMIES APPEAR IN A CLOUD OF STARDUST... ROSANNA, CALLED NEBULA, HER DAUGHTER CRESCENT... AND THE TALKING CAT INCUBUS. NEBULA HAS TRACED THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HER SON GAVIN...



TO ALBONITUS' THRONE ROOM. ALTHOUGH NEITHER KREEGAR NOR ALBONITUS CAN HELP THEM FIND GAVIN, THEY DO RECOVER GAVIN'S RING...



GRETCH REPORTS TO HER TRUE MISTRESS, THE SMALL BUT EVIL MEGALLA. INCUBUS SHADOWS HER AND LEARNS THAT KREEGAR HAD DONE THE KIDNAPPING UNDER MEGALLA'S ORDERS, UNKNOWN TO ALBONITUS, AND THAT NONE OF THEM HAD KNOWN THAT THE KIDNAPPED BOY WAS NEBULA'S SON. THE CAT ALSO OVERHEARS THAT ROSANNA'S HUSBAND GARTH, WHOM ROSANNA FEARED WAS DEAD, IS IN REALITY BEING HELD CAPTIVE IN A HIDDEN PRISON...



FROM THE RING THEY LEARN THAT GAVIN WAS TURNED OVER TO THE DREAD HENCHMEN OF LORD ARGOT (THE RED BUTCHER) IN THE SUBTERRANEAN SEAS.



ONLY THE MONSTER QUELL, WHO DROVE KREEGAR MAD, KNOWS WHERE ARGOT HAS TAKEN GAVIN; SO IN FEARFUL HASTE THEY JOURNEY TO THE ISLE OF QUELL...



Whenever I read any fantasy literature, it always bothers me that I may be mispronouncing the unfamiliar names. So of course (it always says) I have tried to make the spellings in my story as simple as possible. Then a well-meaning friend called my leading lady "Neh-BOO-un", and I decided to take steps. I do believe (with only slight trepidation) that the pronunciations I am giving are clear, and I will elaborate on only three: on as in go, ay as in all, and ah as in hat.

ALBONITUS... ah bon NY tuhs
ARGOT... AWR gawt
CRESCENT... KREHS ehnt
GARTH... gawrth

GAVIN... GAHV ihn
GRETCH... grehtch
INCUBUS... N kyoo buhs
KREEGAR... KREE gawr

MEGALLA. Meh GAWL uh
NEBULA... NEHB yoo luuh
ROSANNA. roh ZAHN nuh
QUELL... kwehl

bones & spheres

Quell! Quell!
Spawn of Hell!
The stakes be thine to name!
Quell! Quell!
Thy secrets tell
If I should win the game!

DON'T BLAME YOUR
MOTHER, CRESCENT!
QUELL WROTE IT
HIMSELF!

STARLIGHT SHIMMERS IN THE WORLD BELOW' THE WAITING BLACKNESS SWALLOWS BOTH THE LIGHT
AND THE RJAL CHANT' SINCE TIME-BEYOND MEMORY THE CHALLENGE HAS BEEN THE SAME, THE
OUTCOME SELDOM DIFFERENT! NO BREEZE HAS EVER STIRRED THE ETERNAL DOLDRUM OF
THESE SUBTERRANEAN WATERS, NOR SUNLIGHT PIERCED ITS STARLESS EVERNIGHT! SOME SAY THE
ISLE OF QUELL IS IN THE VERY CENTER OF THE SUNLESS SEAS' OTHERS CLAIM IT IS AN EXTENSION
OF THE MONSTER HIMSELF. ITS LOCATION OBEDIENT TO HIS MISBEGOTTEN WILL!

SILENCE...

THEN FROM FAR AWAY COMES A
FAINT, RHYTHMIC SOUND...
THE SQUELCH AND CRUNCH
OF A BEHEMOTH TREAD ON ROCK
AND MIRE...

WHAT'S THAT
NOISE, MOTHER?

QUELL ALWAYS WALKS
THE PERIMETER
BEFORE APPEARING'
WE CAUGHT HIM OFF
GUARD, NOT COMING
BY BOAT 'ALL HERE
BEFORE US HAVE
HEARD THAT OMNIOUS
FOOTFALL, BUT FEW
HAVE LIVED TO TELL
ABOUT IT'

“SILENCE”

DAMN HIS SENSE
OF THEATRICS! MUST
HE ALWAYS CRASH
ABOUT AT FIRST
THEN TIPTOE IN
AT THE LAST, JUST
TO GRATE ON YOUR
NERVES!

THE SILENCE YAWNS DEEPER! THE R
HEARTBEATS DRUM LOUDER! THEY
KNOW HE ALWAYS PLAYS THIS
GAME, BUT IT STILL HAS ITS
EFFECT.

QUELL HEEEDS THY PLEA'
THY GAME SHALL BEEE!

QUELL LOOMS OVER THEM LIKE A BLOATED GARGOYLE! HIS LUDICROUS APPEARANCE AND MOCK PROPRIETY BELIE HIS TRUE MALEVOLENCE! THE PALE PHOSPHORESCENCE OF THE PEBBLED SHORE GLISTENS OFF HIS SCALY HIDE! FEW OF THE FIRESIDE TALES OF QUELL EVER NEEDED EXAGGERATION!

GREETINGS, NEBULA, DAUGHTER OF SERAPHHH! I SEE YOU BROUGHT YOUR GIRL CHILD TO VISIT MEE AND A TENDER MORSEL SHE LOOKS TO BEEE' GREETINGS TO YOU, INCUBUSS, GRANDSON OF N MBUSS. QUELL HAS MISSED ALL OF YOU SINCE GARTHH BROUGHT MEE MISSS GIFFET!

SPARE US YOUR TWISTED SENSE OF HUMOR, DESTROYER OF MEN! I COME TO ASK A QUESTION!

QUELL'S THROAT WAS NOT MADE FOR HUMAN SPEECH. THE SHRIILL SINGSONG IT FORGES TEARS NERVE ENDINGS LIKE A CRUDE SCYTHE. THE CAT REVERTS TO PURE ANIMAL. EYES SLITTED, EARS BACK, CLAWS BARED!

LET MEE GUESSS! T SS YOUR SON GAVIN YOU SEEKK QUELL KNOWSS! QUELL KN ASS WHOOO EEE HIM, AND WHEN, AND WHYYY, AND QUELL KNASS WHOO T HEY SOLD HN 'OOO' HIGH PRICCE! HIGH PRICCE! YOUR DAUGHTER'S BONESSS WOULD BEEE QUITE NICCCE!!!

YOU WILL KEEP MY DAUGHTER OUT OF THIS! YOUR GAME IS WITH ME ALONE! AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE IS NOT QUITE SO PRECIOUS AS YOU MIGHT THINK! WE ALREADY KNOW THAT KREEGAR KID NAPPED GAVIN FOR MEGALLA. WE KNOW THEY LEFT HIM HERE BELOW FOR ARGOT'S DARK BOATMEN! MY QUESTON IS A SIMPLE ONE! WHERE IS ARGOT?!, NOW NAME THE STAKES, THAT I MAY CHOOSE THE GAME!



QUELL'S RAUCOUS LAUGHTER PUMBLES LIKE SLIDING GRAVEL.

AHHH YESSS' KREEEGAR!! HEE AND QUELL PLATED GOOD GAMESS TOGETHER! BUT HEE BROKE TOO EASILYEEE...



SO BE IT! WE PLAY THE GAME OF BONES AND SPHERES!

MOTHER!

HUSH CHILD!

WITH A MULTIPLE SHRUG,
QUELL TURNS AND HEADS
UP A STEEP AND TIME-
WORN PATH...

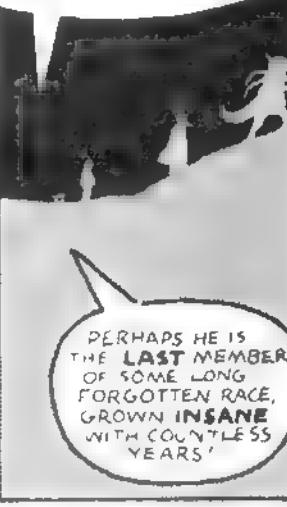
YOUR MOTHER DID WELL!
IT IRKED QUELL TO HAVE
HIS BARGAINING POWER
DEFLATED! HIS PRICE WAS
QUICK AND LOW! HE
IS ALSO DISPLEASED AT
THE CHOICE OF GAMES!
ALTHOUGH ONE OF THE
MOST DANGEROUS IT
IS TOO SHORT FOR HIS
MORBID TASTES!



THE CAT SPITS IN ANSWER

NEBULA IS SILENT...
GATHERING STRENGTH...
TREADING WATER IN AN
OCEAN OF FEAR...

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT
QUELL IS! HIS NAME IS
IN THE OLDEST SONGS!
HIS POWER IS FEARED BY
ALL CLANS! HE NEVER
TAKES SIDES!



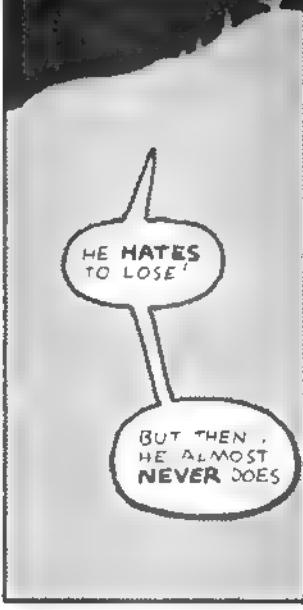
PERHAPS HE IS
THE LAST MEMBER
OF SOME LONG
FORGOTTEN RACE,
GROWN INSANE
WITH COUNTLESS
YEARS!

AS HE PLODS UP THE
SLOPE, QUELL GATHERS
CASTOFF BONES! THOSE
THAT FOLLOW ENVISION
THEIR OWN BONES BEING
USED IN THE MORROW'S
GAME...



HIS KNOWLEDGE
IS UNCANNY!
LITTLE HAPPENS
IN THE SUNLESS
SEAS OR ABOVE
THEM THAT
ESCAPES HIS EAR.
HIS PASSION FOR
GAMES IS
INSATIABLE!

AS THEY NEAR THE TOP
OF THE ROCKY FACE,
QUELL BEGINS HUMMING
A WORDLESS DIRGE...

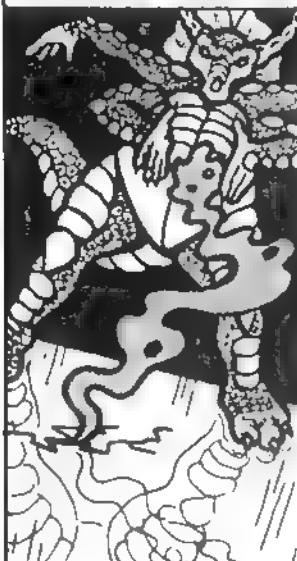


THE SUMMIT IS UNNATURALLY SMOOTH AND GLASSY, AS THOUGH SHEARED OFF BY A MAMMOTH
SWORD IN THE VERY CENTER IS A GAPPING HOLE, PERFECTLY ELIPTICAL IN SHAPE AND SEEMINGLY
BOTTOMLESS! QUELL ADDS HIS COLLECTON TO A LARGER PILE OF BONES THEN WALKS AROUND TO THE
OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE PIT, CLACKING AND BURBLING TO HIMSELF...

I HAVE HEARD LEGENDS
OF THIS PLACE, BUT I
NEVER HOPED TO SEE IT



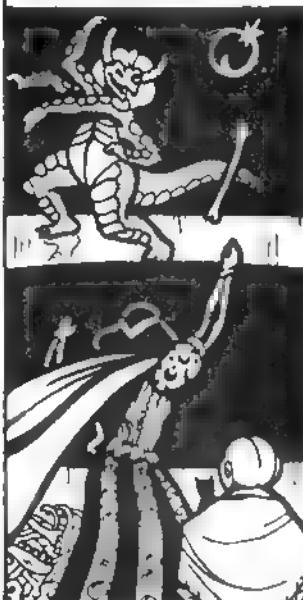
A THIN STREAM OF
WATER TRICKLES FROM
THE ONLY CRACK IN
THE STONE MIRROR AS
QUELL GESTURES T
SPURTS EERILY UPWARD...



TO FORM A DELICATE LIQUID SPHERE IN
HIS MISSHAPEN HANDS...



QUELL TOSSES THE
SPHERE OVER THE ABYSS
AND NEBULA COUNTERS
WITH A BONE

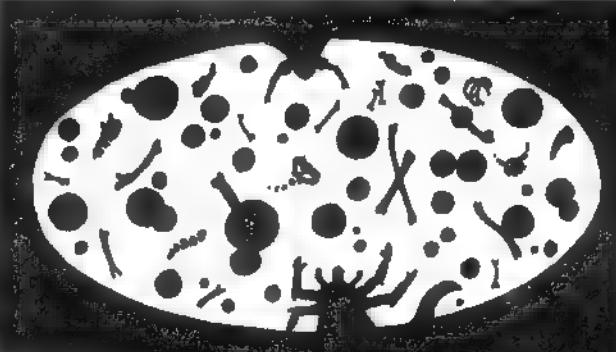


CAUGHT ON ELDRITCH STRINGS, THE BONE AND SPHERE TWITCH AND BOB SPASMODICALLY, THEN STABILIZE, DANGLING ON NOTHING ... OVER NOTHING...



AND THE MAGIC BELONGS TO THE PLACE, NOT TO QUELL...

IN RAPID SUCCESSION THE THROWS ARE EXCHANGED, UNTIL THE AIR OVER THE CHASM IS ALIVE WITH AN INCREDIBLE, SLOW-MOVING BALLET IN DEFiance OF GRAVITY...



THE FINAL PIECES ARE CAST! THE BIZARRE CHOREOGRAPHY STRIKES A FRAGILE BALANCE... AND HOLDS!



FOR LONG MOMENTS NEBULA SEARCHES THE ENIGMATIC ARRAY FOR A HINT OF PATTERN, SEEING THE FATE OF HER SON HANGING OVERHEAD AS WELL...



THE ONLY SOUND IS THE SOFT THUNDER IN INCUBUS' THROAT, AS HIS ANGER AND HIS HELPLESSNESS MOUNT HAND IN HAND...



THE CONFIGURATION LURCHES AND WHEELS DRUNKENLY, THEN READJUSTS TO A GRUDGING SYMMETRY! QUELL HAS PLAYED THIS GAME A THOUSAND TIMES, AND STILL THE SEQUENCE SEEKS TO ELUDE HIM...



THEN A WHIPCRACK HAND SENDS A CASCADE OF BONEDUST INTO THE MOUTH OF THE PIT!

QUELL BEGINS A SONG...

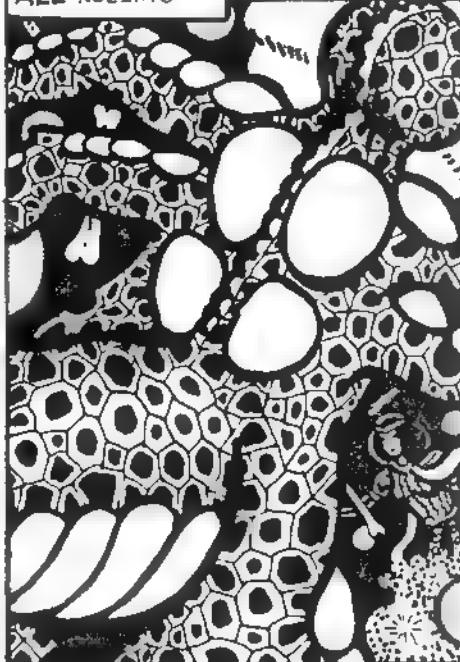
NEBULA'S BODY DISSOLVES INTO SWIRLING MIST AS SHE MAKES TWO RAPID STRIKES IN A ROW!

QUELL'S DISCORDANT BALLAD BOASTS OF HIS LONG LIFE, OF THE MANY GAMES HE'S PLAYED AND WON...



AND HIS MULTIPLE LIMBS BOAST A TRIPLE SCORE.

LIGHTNING BURSTS THAT SEND THE BONES, THE SPHERES, AND THE SENSES ALL REELING...



... ALTERNATE WITH LONG TENSE INTERVALS OF WATCHING AND WAITING! NEBULA BECOMES TIGHT-LIPPED AND DRAWN, WHILE QUELL CROONS HIS OWN PRAISES LONG INTO THE EVERNIGHT!

THE GAME IS ALMOST EVEN! ONLY HALF OF THE TARGETS REMAIN, AND THE BALANCE GROWS MORE CRITICAL AT EVERY MOVE WITH A MANIACAL SURGE OF ENERGY. NEBULA STRIKES AGAIN AND AGAIN, HER HANDS DARTING LIKE QUICKSILVER!

INCUBUS LOOKS ON WITH RISING HORROR! HE KNOWS NEBULA TOO WELL! THE UN-RELENTING PACE HAS ALL BUT DRAINED HER, AND THIS LAST DESPERATE SPURT CAN ONLY LAST A FEW MORE SECONDS...



... NOT NEARLY LONG ENOUGH TO FINISH THE GAME!

QUELL'S SONG ABRUPTLY WITHERS TO AN OMINOUS GURGLE, AND HE ACCELERATES TO KEEP UP...



... AS THE DARK HINT OF DOUBT FLICKERS ACROSS HIS REPTILIAN EYES...

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THEY REACHED QUELL'S ISLE, INCUBUS ALLOWS HIMSELF TO HOPE!





IN THE UPPER WORLD A TINY SLIT
PIERCES THE FABRIC OF THE PRE-
DAWN LEAKING STARDUST...

AS A BONE-WEARY NEBULA,
CHANNELING BORROWED POWER
ATTEMPTS TO BRIDGE WORLDS...

WITH AN ARCANE DOORWAY!

MOTHER! I'LL BE ALL RIGHT,
INCUBUS CRESCENT JUST
SHE'S COLLAPSING...

SO WEAK...

SO TIRED...
THE FRESH
AIR SMELLS
DELICIOUS!

YOU WON, MOTHER!
YOU BEAT QUELL
AT HIS OWN GAME."

YES AND NO CHILD!
AS INCUBUS GUESSED,
I COULD NOT HAVE
LASTED THE GAME!
I HAD ALMOST
DEPLETED ALL OF
MY ENERGY JUST
TO KEEP UP WITH
HIM DURING THE
FIRST HALF!"

I POURED ALL OF MY REMAINING
STRENGTH INTO THAT LAST BURST,
GAMBLING THAT QUELL DON'T KNOW
HOW EXHAUSTED I REALLY WAS
PRAISE THE GIVER, QUELL
FELL FOR MY BLUFF!!
HIS BLOATED EGO
COLLAPSED STOMACH
THE POSSIBILITY
OF LOSING!

NOW THAT WE
KNOW WHERE
ARGOT IS WE
MUST WASTE
NO TIME

ROSANNA, ROSANNA! HOW CAN YOU
SAVE GAVIN WHEN YOU CAN'T
EVEN STAND UP? YOU BOTH NEED TO
REST... TO SLEEP... SLEEP...

THE CATS MIND RIPPLES
GENTLY OVER THE MOTHER
AND DAUGHTER WASHING
AWAY THEIR WEARINESS
SOOTHING THEIR FEARS...

BATHING THEM IN A DEEP,
DREAMLESS SLEEPER!

INCUBUS WATCHES AS THE SKY SOFTENS AND GRAYS, DRAWING
TENTATIVE OUTLINES OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS! HE FINDS REST IN A
SONG AS OLD AS HIS PEOPLE...

"I AM TIRED I AM WEARY
I HAVE WALKED A THOUSAND MILES
A MILLION DREAMS CAN AWAKE ME
BUT I DO NOT KNOW THE WAY
BUT I DO NOT KNOW
THE WAY, ~

AND THE SKY RESPONDS
WITH A NEW DAWN!

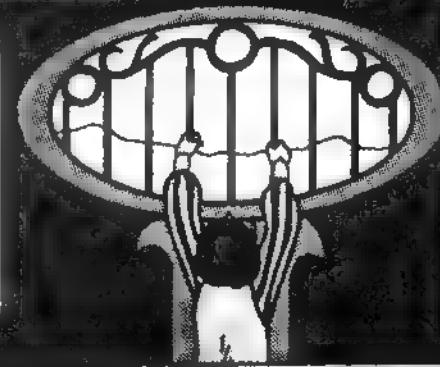
NEBULA

BEWARE OF
ASHENWASTE
MY SON

THERE IS NO BEAUTY
IN ASHENWASTE.
A GREAT TRAGEDY,
WHETHER OF ANGRY
GODS OR ANGRY
MEN, HAD RAZED
IT IN TIME-OUT-OF-
MIND, LEAVING A
DEAD LAND, GRAY
AND EMPTY, A
WOUND UPON THE
EARTH.



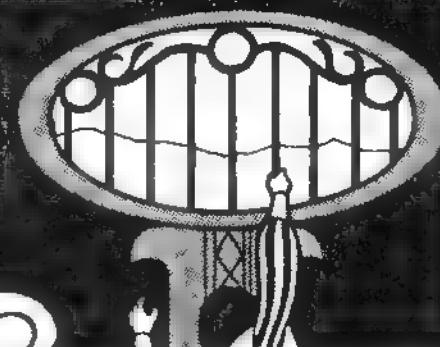
THE MOUNTAIN
IRONSITH, BROUGHT
HERE IN CHAINS IN
AN AGE PAST, KNEW
THIS. THE ORNATE
IRONWORK HE
FORGED FOR THE
WINDOWS OF THE
CASTLE OF CRAGS
COULD DO LITTLE
TO SOFTEN THE
BLEAK HORIZON.



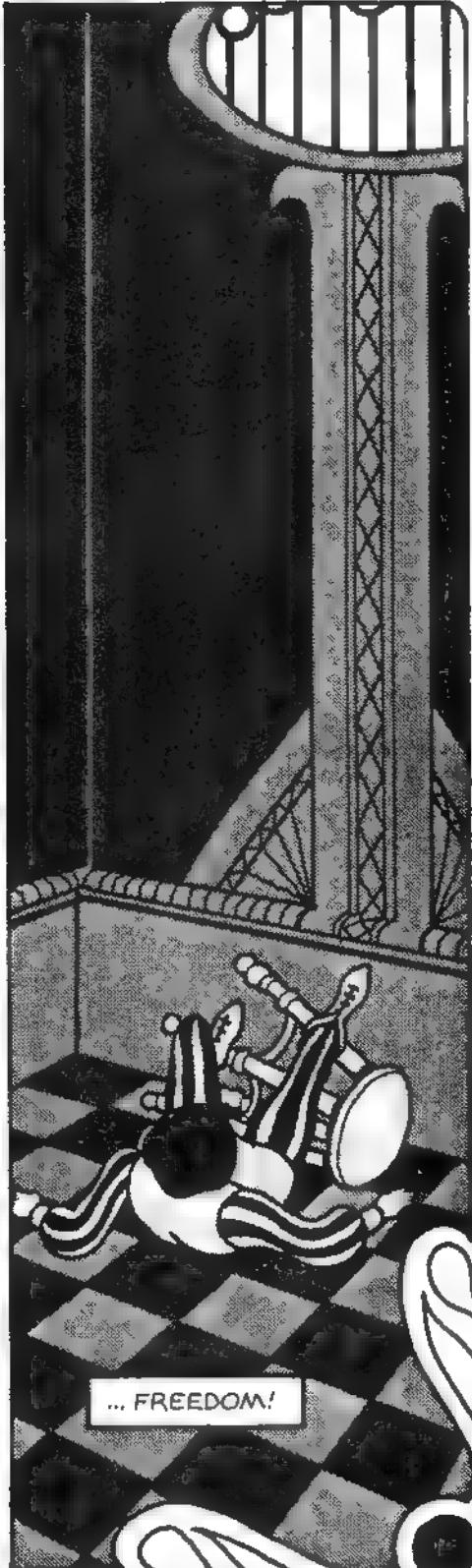
THE DESOLATE GRAY
EXTENDS AS FAR AS
THE EYE CAN SEE.
IN TRUTH, FEW
WOULD WORK AS
HARD TO SEE IT AS
GAVIN NEBULA'S
SON. HIS VISION
IS OF A DIFFERENT
SORT.



THE
BEAUTY
HE
SEES
IS
CALLED..



... FREEDOM!



GAVIN LOOKS AT HIS HANDS, SORE AND BLEEDING FROM SLIDING DOWN THE ROUGH WALL SO MANY TIMES, FROM STRAINING AGAINST BARS FAR BEYOND HIS YOUNG STRENGTH.



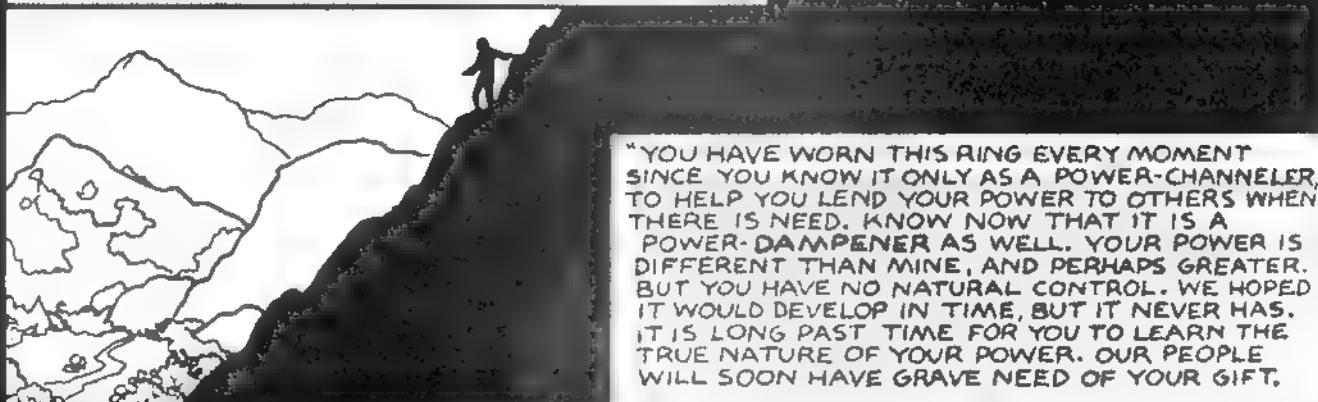
HE ALMOST LAUGHS! THE IRON BARS ARE NOTHING COMPARED TO THE HIDDEN POWER OF HIS HANDS!



AND SHUDDERING, HE REMEMBERS...



IT HAD BEEN ALMOST A YEAR NOW, BUT HIS FATHER'S WORDS ARE STILL CLEAR IN HIS MIND. "THERE IS A THING YOU MUST KNOW, MY SON. WHEN YOU WERE VERY YOUNG A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT HAPPENED. INCUBUS TOOK THE MEMORY OF IT FROM YOU, THAT IT WOULD NOT HARM YOU AS YOU GREW UP. AND I FASHIONED YOU A RING OF MY OWN ENERGY TO PREVENT ITS EVER HAPPENING AGAIN."



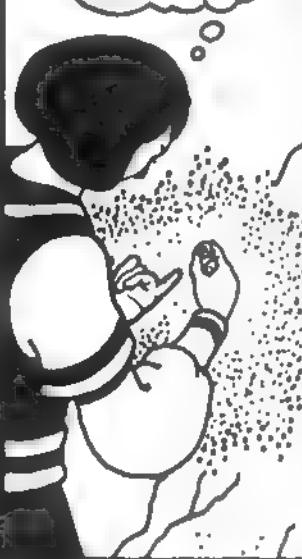
"YOU HAVE WORN THIS RING EVERY MOMENT SINCE YOU KNOW IT ONLY AS A POWER-CHANELER, TO HELP YOU LEND YOUR POWER TO OTHERS WHEN THERE IS NEED. KNOW NOW THAT IT IS A POWER-DAMPENER AS WELL. YOUR POWER IS DIFFERENT THAN MINE, AND PERHAPS GREATER. BUT YOU HAVE NO NATURAL CONTROL. WE HOPED IT WOULD DEVELOP IN TIME, BUT IT NEVER HAS. IT IS LONG PAST TIME FOR YOU TO LEARN THE TRUE NATURE OF YOUR POWER. OUR PEOPLE WILL SOON HAVE GRAVE NEED OF YOUR GIFT."

CLIMB TO THE SHELF OF GIANTS ON THE SOUTH FACE OF THE SPEAKING MOUNTAIN. THERE YOU WILL UNDERGO A TEST."

"THE RING WILL BE YOUR CONTROL, YOUR FOCUS AND YOUR CHANNELER."

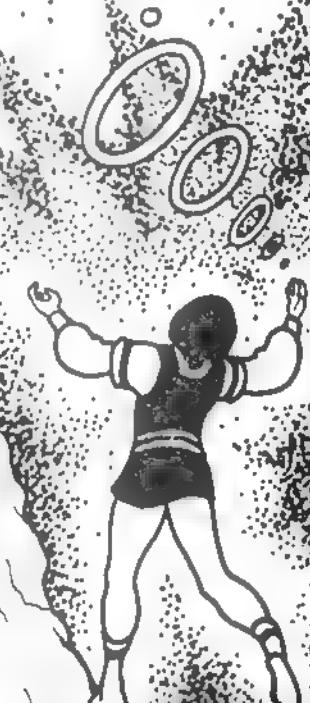
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FORBIDDEN TO REMOVE MY RING. WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

I FEEL A TINGLING, BURNING SENSATION. MY HANDS ARE BEGINNING TO GLOW!



THAT HUGE BOULDER WAS NOT HERE WHEN LAST I CAME. IN SOME WAY IT MUST BE MY TEST.

THE RING IS FLOATING UP OF ITS OWN ACCORD.. GROWING LARGER AND LARGER! MY BODY IS ON FIRE WITH THE RELEASED ENERGY!



THE POWER IS FLOWING UP INTO TWO PULSING ENERGY-SPHERES AROUND MY HANDS! I CAN FEEL IT PEAKING... BURNING...



DRAWN LIKE OPPOSING MAGNETIC POLES, GAVIN'S HANDS THUNDERED TOGETHER WITH A DEAFENING ROAR!



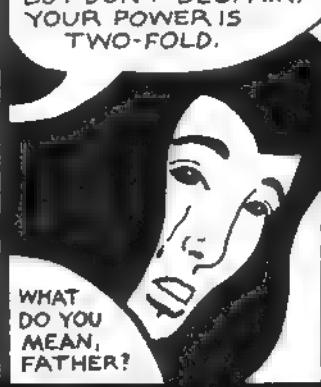
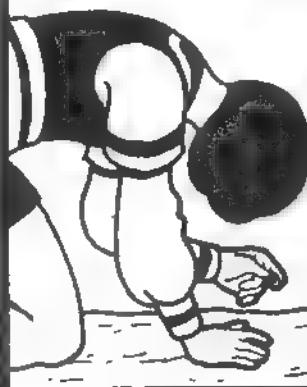
THE EXPLOSION IN HIS MIND WAS OF EQUAL INTENSITY. ALL ENERGY DRAINED FROM HIS BODY, GAVIN WEAKLY RETRIEVED THE FALLEN RING.

THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF HIS NEWFOUND POWER STRETCHED GAVIN'S MIND TO THE THE BREAKING POINT...

AND THE TERROR OF THAT NAMELESS VOID SCREAMED...

DESTROYER!
DESTROYER!
DESTROYER!

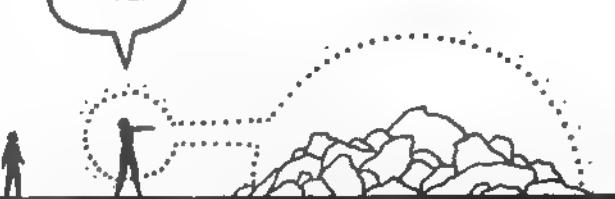
A HARD LESSON, MY SON. I AM GLAD YOU CAN CRY. THE FEAR OF YOUR OWN POWER IS A GOOD THING TO HAVE. IT IS A LESSON I HAVE LEARNED THE HARD WAY AS WELL. BUT DON'T DESPAIR! YOUR POWER IS TWO-FOLD.



WATCH.

BUT I CANNOT TEACH YOU HOW. YOU MUST FIND YOUR OWN WAY...

IF I HAD MY WAY...



THE POWER TO BREAK... IS ALSO THE POWER TO MEND!



THE POWER TO DESTROY... IS ALSO THE POWER TO HEAL!



YOU COULD DAYDREAM ALL DAY AND NEVER EAT THE BREAKFAST I'VE BROUGHT. BUT MY MOTHER LIKETH WITH GUEHTS TO BE WELL FED. CAREFUL! YOU'RE THPILLING IT'



THE HEAVY DOOR SLAMS SHUT. GAVIN HAD LEARNED MORE ABOUT HIS POWER SINCE THAT DAY ON THE MOUNTAIN. SOME TIMES IT FADED OUT COMPLETELY. OTHER TIMES IT CAME ON VERY STRONG



WHEN IT MOUNTS TO ITS PEAK, HE WILL DETONATE, WREAKING RANDOM DESTRUCTION WITH ANYTHING AND ANYONE THAT IS TOO CLOSE. PERHAPS TAKING HIS OWN LIFE AS WELL.



THAT PEAK WILL COME SOON AND WITHOUT THE RING HE HAS NO HOPE OF CONTROLLING IT. AS THE BLACKNESS ENFOLDS HIM, THE EVER-PRESENT NIGHTMARE RETURNS.



IN THE DARKNESS, GAVIN REMEMBERS DARKNESS... A MAMMOTH CAVERN DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH... AND MOGRA, MEGALLA'S HIDEOUS SISTER, SEEKING TO FREE THE UNHOLY POWER OF HIM BELOW! THE ELDERS HAD SENSED THAT FOUL ENERGY DRAWING NEARER TO THE SURFACE, AND SENT US TO STOP IT. FATHER LEFT US ON A PRECIPICE OVERLOOKING MOGRA'S SORCEROUS DEVICE TO SPARE US THE DIRECT BRUNT OF THE BATTLE, AND CIRCLED TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE CAVERN.



'A BATTLE, YET WE CAME AS A FAMILY... MY MOTHER ROSANNA, MY SISTER CRESCENT, INCUBUS THE CAT, MY FATHER AND I. WITH HIS SPECIAL GIFT, FATHER WOULD DRAW ON OUR POWER AND FUSE IT WITH HIS TO FORGE A MIGHTY WEAPON OF THE MIND AS HE CIRCLED FARTHER AWAY, OUR MINDS MERGED CLOSER TOGETHER. THEN CAME THE CHALLENGE'



MOGRA! I AM GARTH THE CLANBINDER! IN THE NAME OF THE NINE WHOM I SERVE, I COMMAND YOU TO STOP! THE RELEASE OF THE UNSPEAKABLE ONE IS FORBIDDEN BY ALL HIGH LAW! YOU TAMPER WITH A FORCE YOU CANNOT CONTROL!



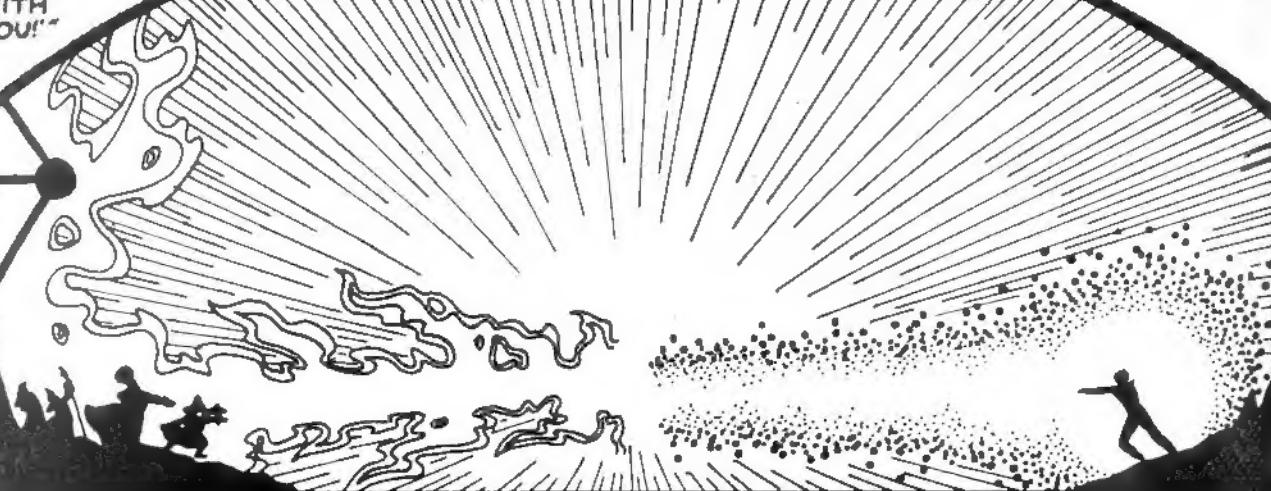
CLANBINDER! WE MEET AGAIN I HAVE WAITED LONG FOR YOU TO FIND ME. MEGALLA EVEN SENT GRETCH FOR THE OCCASSION

YOU ARE DEEP IN THE EARTH CLANBINDER FAR FROM THE SKY-HOME OF THE LORDS OF LIGHT. HERE THE DEVOURER IS STRONGEST AND I AM TAPPED INTO HIS POWER! YOU SHOULD HAVE REMAINED ON THE SURFACE ABOVE FOR YOU SHALL NEVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN!"



"WE SENSE YOUR FAMILY NEARBY,
CLANBINDER!" CACKLED
MOGRA. "KNOW AS
YOU DIE THAT
THEY DIE
WITH
YOU!"

"AS THE TWO MIGHTY FORCES
LASHED OUT, THE CAVERN
RUPTURED IN A NOVA OF
BLINDING
LIGHT!"



"OUR PERCH CRUMPLED
BENEATH OUR FEET AS
THE ROOF RAINED DOWN
ON OUR HEADS."

"I BLACKED OUT... THEN
SENSATION SLOWLY RETURNED
AS FROM A GREAT DISTANCE
... MY BODY FELT FRAGMENTED
INTO THOUSANDS OF TINY
MOTEs, AS IF I WAS
SIFTING THROUGH SAND..."

"MUCH LATER, SOLIDITY RETURNED IN
BRIGHT DAYLIGHT."

"GIVER BE PRAISED, WE MADE
IT! I DIDN'T KNOW IF I WOULD
BE ABLE TO PULL US ALL OUT OF
THE HOLOCAUST AND THROUGH
THOSE MILES OF
EARTH IN THE
WRAITH-STATE,
BUT IT WAS OUR
ONLY HOPE."

"BUT
FATHER!
HE WAS
TOO FAR
AWAY
FROM US!"

"GARTH!
GARTH!!

QUICKLY, ALL OF
YOU, GRAB MY HANDS!"



"THEN CAME THE SEARCH, THE FRUITLESS SEARCH, AS THE
POWER OF COMBINED MIND-TOUCH GROPED THROUGH
SUBTERRANEAN DEPTHS."

GRIEF YANKS GAVIN BACK TO THE
PRESENT, TO THE EMPTINESS
OF HIS CELL, AND TO THE
MOUNTING THROB OF HIS
UNCONTROLLABLE POWER.

"I'M SORRY, ROSANNA, BUT IT'S NO USE. THE
TOUCH OF GARTH'S LIVING MIND IS NOWHERE
BELOW US. IT WAS THE CHANCE HE TOOK. WE
CAN ONLY HOPE MOGRA AND HER EVIL DEVICE
PERISHED AS WELL."



HAD HIS MOTHER, HIS SISTER
AND INCUBUS BEEN ABLE TO
TRACE HIM AFTER HIS DISAP-
PEARANCE? IF THEY WERE TO
FIND HIM, IT MUST BE SOON.

TO BE CONTINUED...

SF READING LIKE THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN EVERY DAY!

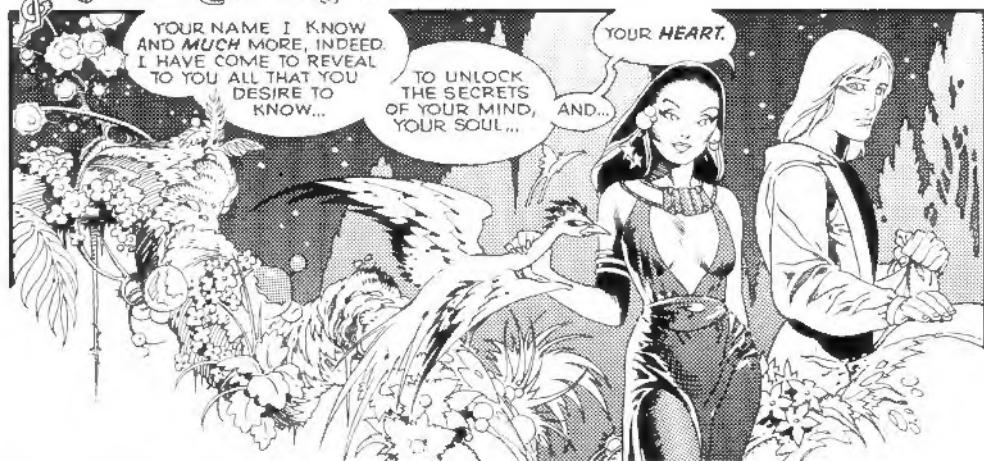
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Says "First Printing July 1979" on page 2.